Lapsley closed the book and moved to lift the lid of the coffin. Dray was lying on a white pad, bare to the waist and someone had bandaged his gaping wound. Above the white ceinture his shoulders and arms were hardly marked, and his face was unchanged, the bold, sensual features composed, the waving silk of his hair a little ruffled by the close edge of the coffin.

Kirk stepped forward and smoothed the boy's hair. Safe to touch now, to give the comfort that was no longer needed.

"Dray saved my life without counting the cost." He stepped back.

Uhura came forward. "Dray was strong. He used his strength for others."

"He was a gentleman," said McCoy. "I am proud to have served with him."

"He saved my men on Gamma Hydrae IV," Lapsley said. "I don't think he ever knew fear."

"He took care of us in the dark and I never thanked him," said Sunderson.

"He did his job," Nadia said. She turned to Spock.

The Vulcan stepped forward and looked down at the pale face. He had given his valediction. His hand went out to touch Dray's forehead.

"He was worthy of love."

They closed the cover and dogged the bolts home, to save him from decompression, and left him alone in the room. Lapsley secured the airlock door and moved to the controls while they watched. He cut ship's gravity in the little room, and pushed the button that would open the exterior doors. The rush of air toward the black gulf would be enough to stir the coffin and carry it out, floating, its movement as random as anything in space. They waited until the indicators showed the chamber empty and Lapsley sealed the lock again.

"'Night covers them'," Kirk said. "Tell Scotty we can get under way again."

They separated at the lift, Uhura and Sunderson returning to duty stations, Nadia and Lapsley to whatever they did in off duty hours. McCoy went to some unfinished business in sickbay and Kirk and Spock were left standing shoulder to shoulder, a contact neither of them moved to break until the doors opened and they could seek the refuge of Spock's cabin.

Kirk dropped onto the bed and rolled his head from side to side, fighting tension in his neck. Guilt, he told himself, is a cheap substitute for responsibility. All you can do now, is--do better the next time. But that resolution could not banish the feeling of undeserved reward.

Dray had been worthy of love. He had wanted life, but he was drifting in the eternal night between the stars. Spock, also worthy of love, had nearly died for lack of it, and yet for James Kirk it was poured out freely, with no price but acceptance. Injustice always angered him and there was no justice in love. He felt tender and fierce at once. Spock should lack nothing he could give.

The Vulcan was still standing in the middle of the room, lost in thought, his face so closed and quiet Kirk had to offer comfort. He rose and pulled the tall figure close, tipping Spock's head down on his shoulder, offering his own closeness wordlessly until he felt tears against his neck.

"For Dray?" he asked.

A negative shake of Spock's head denied it. He pulled a little away.

"For myself, because I had no tears to give him. People have loved me, Jim, and I couldn't even cry for them. I could give life easier than tears."

"You can cry now."

Another shake of the head as Spock wiped the tears away, studied the moisture on the back of his fingers.

"I don't want to cry now." He reached out and touched the moisture to Kirk's cheek. "I want--I want you," and Spock pulled him close, into a kiss that dimmed every other reality, started the nebula swirling in the dark. Some interior censor weighed Dray's still face and Spock's tears. Speak, and then pass on, duty is to the living. Kirk yielded to the kiss, the fevered hunger claiming him. What Spock wanted, whatever Spock wanted, he wanted too.

His lips were stinging as he pulled away for breath and the gravity seemed stronger in the room, pulling him down until he had to cling to Spock like a drunken man. Was it Spock who couldn't ask for love? A breath of laughter shook him at his own dazed state, at the hunter's look Spock bent on him.

"I think you're learning to say what you want, Spock."

The laughter communicated itself to Spock, who kissed him again, bruising his lips, using his strength, the strength of his desire to demand response. He drew back and surveyed Kirk's face with satisfaction.

"Convincingly, I hope?"

"God, yes." Kirk's hands, his weight were urging Spock to the floor, pulling him down, but Spock wouldn't yield, held him up and away, effortlessly.

"Not yet," he said. The hands turned Kirk, faced him to the full length mirror. "Look at yourself."

Kirk took in his touseled hair, swollen lips, and his eyes, hooded with pleasure. His face looked solemn and heavy and a flush was burning in his face, down his neck.

"Now undress," commanded Spock. "Watch yourself in the mirror."

Half hypnotized by that purr, Kirk stripped off his shirt and let it drop, his eyes going to Spock's in the mirror. Spock's hand flashed out and impacted sharply against his left buttock, hard enough to hurt.

"Watch yourself," he warned.

Kirk dropped his eyes to his waist in the mirror, where he could see Spock, behind him and to one side, copying his gestures. Spock's shirt fell and Kirk's hands went to the fastening of his pants, opened the waist band, slid the closure down. He let the pants fall, a little, and then deliberately hooked his thumbs inside the waistband of his briefs and slid them down a cautious inch and then another.

Risking another blow if the movement didn't please Spock, Kirk turned his right side to the mirror and bent forward, vulnerable, easing the cloth down below his hips, presenting himself, one cheek